

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A sampling device comprising:
 - (a) an elongate handle with a distal paddle head;
 - (b) an absorbent material placed about the paddle head; and
 - (c) a score line located across the handle at a location adjacent the padded head; wherein during use, the paddle head and absorbent material may be snapped off of the elongate handle.
2. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material is sized sufficiently large to encompass the exposed score line after the paddle head is snapped from the handle.
3. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material is a single piece of generally rectangular absorbent material folded about the paddle head and adhered thereto.
4. The sampling device according to Claim 3, wherein the head includes a distal edge and the absorbent material is folded about the distal edge.
5. The sampling device according to Claim 4, wherein the paddle head is approximately 0.2 cm thick, 3.2 cm wide, and 3.2 cm long; and wherein the absorbent material is approximately 1.5 cm thick, 4.0 cm wide, and 8.0 cm long.
6. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material overhangs the score line by an amount in the range of about 0.5 cm to about 1.0 cm.
7. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material is formed of at least one of cellulose, polyurethane, polyester, and gauze .
8. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the handle and paddle head are integrally formed.
9. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the handle and paddle head are formed of at least one of polystyrene, polycarbonate, polypropylene, and acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene.

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10. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the handle includes a thumb stop.

11. The sampling device according to Claim 1, wherein the score line ends are recessed from the edges of the handle and wherein the portions of the handle adjacent the score line ends are rounded.

12. A sampling device comprising:

(a) an elongate handle with an integrally-formed distal paddle head, the head includes an outer edge;

(b) a single piece of generally rectangular absorbent material folded about the paddle head outer edge and adhered thereto; and

(c) a score line located across the handle at a location adjacent the padded head; the score line including first and second ends recessed from the edge of the handle; the portions of the handle adjacent the score line ends being rounded; the absorbent material overhanging the score line by an amount in the range of about 0.5 cm to about 1.0 cm;

wherein during use, the paddle head and absorbent material may be snapped off of the elongate handle, the overhanging portion of the absorbent material encompassing the exposed score line after the paddle head is snapped from the handle.

13. A method of sampling microorganisms, comprising:

(a) wiping a surface with a sampling device having an elongate handle with a distal paddle head, an absorbent material placed about the paddle head, and a score line located across the handle at a location adjacent the padded head;

(b) inserting the paddle head with absorbent material into a flexible-walled sample bag;

(c) grasping the paddle head from the exterior of the sample bag;

(d) breaking the handle from the paddle head at the score line; and

(e) removing the handle from the bag.

14. The method according to Claim 13, wherein the handle includes a thumb stop located approximately mid-way along the handle; and wherein during use, the paddle head is inserted into the sample bag up to the thumb stop.

15. The method according to Claim 13, wherein the ends of the score line are recessed from the edge of the handle and wherein the portions of the handle adjacent the score line ends are rounded.

16. The method according to Claim 13, wherein the absorbent material is sized sufficiently large to encompass the exposed score line after the paddle head is broken from the handle.

17. The method according to Claim 16, wherein the absorbent material overhangs the score line by an amount in the range of about 0.5 cm to about 1.0 cm.